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MCCONE TO C.I.A.

John A. McCone, the former chairman of the Atomic Energy commission, may seem to many a surprising choice to succeed Allen W. Dulles as head of the Central Intelligence agency. This is the apparent likelihood, but the selection of Mr. McCone is not in fact unusual except from one aspect.

Mr. McCone is a Republican, but President Kennedy has been making it a point to name Republicans who have not a too-partisan coloration to certain key posts in his administration. The president deliberately chose to retain the services of Mr. Dulles at the beginning of the new administration for the sound reason that the C. I. A. director had developed a strong position with the Congress and with the public as one who had done a fine job. In fact Mr. Dulles enjoyed the reputation of America's unique master spy, with all the special connotations involved.

Mr. McCone, if he is actually appointed to the C. I. A. office, will continue the practice of putting this extraordinary assignment outside partisan considerations, and will also serve President Kennedy's special needs of building broader congressional and national support for his administration in the light of the hair-line electoral decision which brought him to the White House. What happened in the session of Congress now adjourned must have strengthened Mr. Kennedy's feeling of need for all the support he can get for his administration.

John Alex McCone, was generally unknown to the nation before his appointment in June, 1958, by President Eisenhower to a five-year term to succeed the unfortunate Adm. Lewis L. Strauss as A. E. C. chairman. There is a much bigger background of government service than that experience, however, and there is the happy fact that in that biggest and most delicate assignment in Washington he brought the A. E. C. through the congressional impasse it had reached because of the bitter personal enmity which Admiral Strauss had aroused with the joint congressional committee on atomic energy.

Previously in government, Mr. McCone has served as an adviser to President Truman, as undersecretary of the air force, and as special representative for President Eisenhower. As a member of President Truman's air policy commission in 1947, McCone helped to write the report "Survival in the Air Age," a document which helped bring air defense policies up to date. In 1948 he served as special deputy to Secretary of Defense James V. Forrestal, when he became responsible for preparing the first and second budgets of the newly formed department of defense. While with the air force as undersecretary in 1951, he sent a memorandum to President Truman recommending an embryo missile program under someone "with full authority and control of funds to exercise absolute power over the entire effort." The memorandum was recalled, in chagrin, after the first Soviet sputnik dramatized the nation's shortcomings in this field.

The West Coast industrial and engineering career he had pursued before the calls to Washington began was a sensational success. Steel, construction engineering around the world, shipbuilding and shipping have been his field of activity, and his remarkable record of success in management, innovation, planning and organization was obviously the factor which turned the government's attention to his manifold talents. He is a leading Roman Catholic layman, represented the United States at the 17th anniversary of the coronation of Pope Plus XII in 1958, and was one of three American representatives at the funeral of Plus.

A native San Franciscan, Mr. McCone is 59 years old, although his appearance and responsibilities give the impression he is an older man.

Mr. Dulles no doubt has special feeling about the ability of a successor to manage the job he has almost made his personal property, but he is probably relieved that he is leaving it in as skilled and experienced hands as Mr. McCone's.